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Duty and Interest Identical in the Present Crisis.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

ALL SOULS' CHURCH,

ON

SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 14th, 1861,

BY

HENRY W. BELLOWS.

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S E R M O N .

“Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.”—LUKE XXI : 26.

THE introduction of our sacred religion was attended and followed by most distressing events. Our Lord prepared the minds and hearts of his immediate disciples for the perils of ease, property, and life, which were to distinguish the generation that founded the Church, openly predicting universal perplexity and distress, but exhorting them that when all other “men’s hearts were failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which were coming on the earth,” they should “look up and lift up their heads,” for “their redemption was drawing nigh.”

We are so little used, in these modern times, to suffering for our principles—so little accustomed to be called to long and exhausting sacrifices for our religion—that we are all somewhat out of sympathy with those who, from the first, have done the work of pioneering the cause of truth, justice, and humanity in the world. The long period of peace and prosperity we have enjoyed has taught us to flatter ourselves that the time was gone by when men were likely again to be called on to suffer the spoiling of their goods, the interruption of their domestic comfort, the imperilling of their fortunes, for the sake

of any of the permanent interests of society. That was very well in Revolutionary times, or Puritan times, or Reformation times, or Apostolic times ; and we have no praises too strong, no gratitude too deep, to convey our sense of the glorious merits of those who counted their lives not dear, and their possessions dross and dung, when the great principles of humanity, order, justice, piety, summoned them to risk all in their defense. But these are modern times ; times when agriculture and commerce and manufactures are the great interests ; times when schools and churches are the main bulwarks of truth and morality, and when we are expecting to have our duty and our principles somehow made consistent, if not coincident, with our interest and prosperity ; and so, in the deepest view, but only in that, they are.

I desire to speak with true respect of the material interests of society. The real progress of the world depends very much on peace and prosperous industry, and widespread, because safe and rewarding, commerce. Christianity has immensely advanced the wealth and comfort of society, and the riches and peace of the world have repaid religion by munificent support of her cause. It is not necessarily a mean and selfish instinct which makes us so sensitive to the prospects of our material interests. The bread, safety, and happiness of our wives and children ; the prosperity of our social, civil, and humane institutions ; the support of religion itself ; the supply of labor and food

to the masses of the people—all are finally dependent upon the undisturbed condition of trade, the sound basis of monetary affairs, and the pacific prospects of the world. There can be no difference among sensible men as to the vast importance of stability in the industry and commercial and fiscal affairs of the nation.

Radically and truly considered, however, there is no conflict between the moral interests of society and its material interests. What is most for the interest of piety and virtue is most for the interest of trade and commerce. What best serves God and humanity, best serves basket and store. Any seeming antagonism here is not real, but due only to our shortsightedness. It is proved indisputably that public morality and piety are in the highest degree favorable to public wealth, and that the most moral and religious nations are the richest. It is with moral and spiritual truths, as it is with scientific and economical truths—they always seem to threaten disaster when they first break upon the notice of the world, but soon show themselves to be the guardians and most efficient promoters of the real interests which it is predicted they are swiftly to ruin. Thus, the introduction of machine labor was *going* to ruin the industry of England; and the abolition of the Corn Laws was going to ruin the British landholders; the invention of steam power was going to make horses of no value; the education of the lower classes was going to sow dangerous political discontents among the people; the abolition of a religious

establishment was going to prostrate Christianity. But nothing of this happened; for, when things are right in principle, they always work right in practice, after a little time; and when things are wrong in principle, they always work wrong in practice, sooner or later. It is right in principle to economize labor, to do things in the cheapest and most efficient way, to let in light, to discuss all matters with freedom and thoroughness, to do justice, to tell the truth, to insist on equity, to maintain law and order, and uphold public rights; and, therefore, carrying out these principles in trade, commerce, labor, in politics, morals, and religion, is always safe and beneficent, and favorable to stability; and nothing else is. To favor imperfection, knowing it to be such; to encourage hand-labor against machine-labor; to suppress intellectual and moral light, as if it were a foe; to cover up known wrong; to sophisticate ourselves for the sake of immediate interest—is as fatal to permanent well-being as it is contrary to sound principle and good sense.

No doubt every great step forward in science, art, social economy, in politics, morals, and religion, injures the material interest of some class whose prosperity is built upon the superseded policy. The discovery and introduction of luminous gas has seriously damaged the whaling interest. Elementary education has become so general with us, that a class of persons who formerly made their living by reading to the illiterate and writing their letters,

a class still known in some European countries, is extinguished. The turnpike property throughout the North has lost all its value through the introduction of railroads. And every day, science, morals, religion, as they advance, threaten some interest based upon past ignorance of their highest laws. All the gaming houses of England and France complained of the fanaticism which banished their once open tables to the petty principalities of Germany; while the lottery business, lately so prosperous and flourishing in this country, shrieked as it fell dead under the moral sentiment of our Northern States. Does any one doubt the vast material gain accruing to society from these steps, fatal as they were to special interests, which themselves were poisonous to the State?

So English emancipation in the West Indies, which, undoubtedly, seriously injured the interest of the great proprietors, and diminished the exported sugar crop, it is now demonstrated has actually increased vastly the well-being of the general population of the islands, the amount of their products, and the moral character of the people. Being right in principle, it must inevitably prove right in practice, and this was sure to appear after a fair chance was given to the experiment. At this moment, the total exports of the British West Indies, excepting Jamaica, ruined before emancipation begun, exceed by seventy-seven millions of pounds of sugar those of its most prosperous slave-labor year, while its imports from England and Amer-

ica have advanced from 8,840,000 to 14,600,000, proving, in the most satisfactory manner, the pecuniary advantage of pursuing the humane and Christian policy of emancipation.

It is, therefore, a grand mistake to imagine that our duty and our interest are ever permanently at war ; or that we can be too just, or too humane, or too right, or too God-fearing for our welfare. Temporarily our advance in scientific, economic, political, or moral wisdom, may cost us some serious sacrifices ; but only to save us from far more permanent calamities. It is sticking to falsehoods as if they were truths ; adhering to policies that are behind the age and the times ; attempting to back up blunders and mistakes ; to whitewash what is black, and brazen out what is wrong—that causes the downfall of industries, disturbs trade, ruins commerce, and upsets society and government. Scientific, economical, moral, political, religious truths, all hang together. There is no war among them. They support, uphold, and illustrate each other ; and it is only error, mistake, wrong, darkness, sin, folly, which occasion the disturbances that in our haste we attribute to the fanatical progress of truth.

It is idle and mischievous to think of the material and the moral interests of our own beloved country as at war with each other. Nothing immoral can be for our interest. Our people generally wish to do what is just and right, and as a rule they believe honesty the best policy, and hu-

manity the best business. They have grown up, certainly in our own section of the land, under the conviction that the blessing of God was upon their industry, trade, and commerce; and that their material prosperity need not hinder their fidelity to conscience and their allegiance to the Almighty. And they are right in this faith. God is on the side of justice. Duty is rewarding. Conscience is a lamp to the feet of the wise and prudent. Now and then it leads to martyrdom and the loss of all that is commonly held dear, but its usual light falls upon the path of safety and success. And when it does its exceptional work, when it kindles the faggots of the confessor and the saint, or consumes the hero in the heat of his own patriotic zeal, the flame of that sacrifice sheds a benignant illumination over centuries of tolerance and of security purchased at this noble rate. There can be no greater error than that which supposes that the great names or the marked eras of suffering for conscience and principle have originated in a sublime disregard of the peace and prosperity of society. Heroes die at their lonely post—and one may be sacrificed this very day*—for a punctilio of soldierly duty; but that punctilio measures the hair-breadth that saves the national ship from going to pieces on the rock it grazes. Saints go to the stake for a scruple of conscience; but that scruple weighs mountains in the scales of human destiny, and the sufferings it exacts vindicate a policy that involves the in-

* Fort Sumter and Major ANDERSON were supposed to be still under fire at the moment when these words were uttered

dependence, the self-government, the energy and spirit of untold generations. A nation goes to war on a preamble, or on some nice question of the right of visitation, or on some fine point of honor. Is it for purely imaginary interests, is it for a salve to wounded sensibility, the gratification of passion and pride, that the dreadful arbitrament of war is invoked on such occasions? No! it is because it is rightly felt that the self-respect, the honor, the dignity of a nation, is at the very bottom of its prosperity—that to lose confidence in the country, to abate loyal feeling, to weaken national pride, is to put at peril every interest of trade, commerce, and industry—is to strike at the root of stability, to invite foreign contempt, to drive away capital and labor, to dishearten and demoralize youth, to rend the foundations of morals and piety, and to lessen by billions the productive power and real wealth of the country. The prosperity of a people is based on its honest pride in their institutions, on its confidence in their statesmen and rulers, on the inviolability of its flag, and the strength and stability of the public credit. Let repudiation either of oaths of office or promises to pay, find favor in a State, and its whole people are suddenly struck with palsy. What a blow is given to business, when it becomes doubtful whether the very Army and Navy of a nation can be trusted with the honor of their own standards! What an element of demoralization is let loose, when casuistry is the only defence which gentlemen have left for their staggering veracity! Who will trust a

region, where its first men have a code of honor peculiar to their own latitude, and a course of behavior that can be vindicated only from *their* point of view? Right and wrong, truth and falsehood, honor and dishonor, are not matters of latitude and longitude. There is said to be honor among thieves, but it never stood them in much stead at the bar of justice, or in the money market; and it never will. Be sure that public prosperity, business success, stability of fortune, repose on fidelity to world-wide principles of truth and right, and not on fidelity to local or sectional passions and prejudices, North or South, East or West.

I am addressing a commercial congregation—men who are the first to feel the effects of national agitation; and who naturally and properly dread the suspense, the want of confidence, and the interruption of trade, produced by any terrible crisis in public affairs. I know very well, that it is not a little more or less of domestic splendor, or personal comfort, a few more hundreds or thousands in the strong-box; a rise or fall of ten or even fifty per cent. in stocks and mortgages, that appals their hearts. It is the sickening uncertainty how they are to meet their engagements; how in a totally changed state of things they are to fulfill promises made in the best faith, and to carry out large plans, from which there is no retreat, formed under other circumstances. With enormous rents, heavy stocks of goods, large foreign obligations, and a sudden and wide stagnation of business, what but solicitude can fill their

souls ? Who can wonder at “men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth” ? It is an honorable, not a selfish anxiety ; and I wish to God I could say it were unnecessary, or likely soon to pass away. But, I beg you to remember that just the creditable anxiety you feel as merchants, to preserve your honor untarnished, to uphold your credit and meet your engagements—a feeling to which you would gladly sacrifice any present convenience, or even private fortune—is the very same anxiety which the country or the Government feels towards its own honor and credit—as the basis of our complete future prosperity as a people. If you know that your honor and credit are the conditions of all your success or hope as merchants, how much more must the Government or the nation know that its honor and credit are the conditions of our general well-being, and of our stability and growth as a people ? You may be called on as a class to suffer more than any other for the present year or the next five years, in order that the nation, as a nation, may not forfeit its ability to protect your commerce and favor your trade for generations to come. The commerce and trade—not of this spring or next fall, not of this year or next year—but of the next hundred years, is imperilled. If doubts of the possibility of republican and democratic institutions are encouraged and fortified—if radical suspicion of the theory of our Constitution is fostered—if faith in the honor of our high public officers, if confidence

in our army and navy, are destroyed abroad and at home—then “farewell—a long farewell to all our greatness,” commercial and political. We had better freely sacrifice our fortunes and our lives, than allow the pestilent principles to prevail which have already struck disgrace upon our character, and which, if not stopped in their career, will make another Mexico of our country. Your warehouses will indeed be converted into deserted palaces, and your docks into empty and sailless ditches—if the arm of the Government is not nerved with your confidence, and strung with the fibres of your loyalty and sympathy.

It is our first duty to look our affairs directly in the face. They are too serious and solemn for partisan feelings or personal interests to sway our judgment, or color our speech. War has been made upon the General Government by a conspiracy of rebellious States. I will not say that these States may not think themselves right in their course. I even dare to say that they do so—for I believe that a people who can persuade themselves that it is honorable, prudent, politic, necessary, democratic, or Christian, to live by slave labor, and that Slavery is a blessing and a divine institution, may persuade themselves of any thing most false and injurious; may persuade themselves that secession is a doctrine not absolutely incompatible with the very idea of government; that resignation on the eve of battle in a soldier is not equivalent to desertion; that the use of a high confidential public station for disarming the Government

whose pay it receives, is a feat to be boasted of and fêted; and that the moral judgment of the civilized world may be victoriously withstood! Allowing, therefore, perfect sincerity and the clearest conscience on the part of the rebellious States, now at war upon our flag—the question for us is, what self-preservation, what humanity, what wisdom and justice and mercy demand of us to do? I believe that the very foundations of order, prosperity, self-government, liberty, morality, and religion, are rocking to their ruin under the false theories and pernicious policy of the assailants of our Government and their abettors, and that it is no longer a party question, or a question of expediency, but a matter of direct and most pressing necessity, to spring with united hearts and determined hands to the defence of law and the maintenance of National authority. We have reached the point when National demoralization must either end, or must end us. The key-stone of all stability, sense of security, confidence in each other, honor and truth, is already loosened; and if it falls, the complete arch of our civil, social, economic, and domestic peace and prosperity will be in ruins. To uphold the Government—be it in whose hands it may—is to fix this key-stone. It is worth a thousand millions to keep it from yielding another hair. It is worth a hundred thousand lives to cement it in its place. Each man of us had better give ten years of his remnant of days, and half his fortune, than permit one jot or tittle more of the national authority to pass away. For if it is successfully withstood and broken, our

property is a fiction, and our lives a spoil. Bad men are now on the watch to spring at our mints and vaults, our forts and arsenals. We know not how much we owe it to the vigilance of our police that violence has not already polluted our own Northern streets. Our real danger will disappear only when the sickly doubt of our true policy, and the paralyzing fear of immediate losses, have passed from our still loyal States. When we are thoroughly and overwhelmingly united in our patriotism, in our allegiance to law and order; when we have drowned partisan clamors and jealousies in a common tide of devotion to public duty, and risen to the greatness of the emergency, as one involving every material, social, and moral interest—then our day of greatest peril will be over, and the contest will be immediately narrowed to its smallest dimensions. The worst thing now to be dreaded is irresolution, timidity, and division. We must no longer wait for each other. If the Border States are in doubt, they must choose between those who are themselves already fully decided on both sides of them, and be either the open friends or the open enemies of the Constitution and the Government. We have no business any longer to wait on their suspense. Our enemies are in earnest; they are united, and energetic, and resolved. They must find us equally so, or our Capital will soon be a foreign capital, and our Nation a slaveocracy.

It is a sad day, my brethren, when Christian duty makes us militant, and denies us the blessed privilege of breathing peace. It is a melancholy hour when even the

house of God and the temple of Christ becomes a sort of fortress and battle-field. But I wish to know nothing of that kind of religion which will not defend the sacred interests of society, with all the power, physical and moral, which God and nature have supplied. My own enemies I will forgive, and continually turn to them the other cheek; but the enemies of humanity—the enemies of all order, truth, and virtue—the enemies of my country, I will not, upon any theory of peace or meekness, unresistingly suffer to achieve their guilty purposes, so long as there is a drop of blood in my heart, a fibre of muscle in my arm, or a note of warning in my voice!

Our strife, alas! is with our brethren; but when a brother strikes at a mother's heart, filial duty takes precedence of fraternal obligation. We have been forbearing, patient, slow to anger—most anxious for peace. But we are not men, much less Christians, if we suffer the great fabric of our American civilization, the great inheritance of our Constitution and Union, to lapse into ruin, from intestine treachery or local passion—without a tremendous effort to save it. God grant us something of that mingled “goodness and severity” which illustrates His own merciful but vigorous government. Save us from cowardice, irresolution, and division! Direct us the shortest road to peace, and spare us the awful necessity of rebaptizing our liberties in rivers of blood—and the more terrible calamity of losing them from supineness, selfishness, and infidelity to truth, humanity, conscience, and God.

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